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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

SPANISH THEATRES AND ACTORS.

IN no other country is the theatre as popular as in Spain. After the bull-fight, a Spaniard loves the theatre best. A true Spanish home is so dull that men and women alike scarcely ever spend a quiet evening in their inner circle. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that they should prefer to leave their uncomfortable rooms to get warmed and dazzled for a few hours in the glare of a *teatro*. It is there also they see their friends, and continue their habitual *tertulia* or gossip. Even the children love the drama, play, or *sainete*, and on Sunday afternoons and feast days their mammams deck them up in finery and take them to see the latest sensational play. It is curious indeed to watch a box full of baby faces keenly interested and devouring a terrible drama full of harrowing scenes, or laughing at a short play full of wit and piquant jokes. It does not seem at all natural to see children taken to these spectacles, but Spanish children are little old men and women, and a fairy pantomime would be too dull for them.

In Madrid there are almost as many theatres as churches. They are very commodious, splendidly decorated, and all built after the same model. A large stage, a pit full of cozy red velvet *butacas* or stalls where ladies and gentlemen sit together, and round the house the *palcos* or boxes, large and airy, with looking glasses, chairs, and carpets. Above the tiers of boxes is the *paraiso*, paradise or cheap gallery, which derives its name from its vicinity to the sky.

The Madrid Opera House is perhaps smaller than the Grand Opera or Covent Garden, but is by far more convenient. It reminds one of a dainty ladies' boudoir; it is so fresh and bright with its red and gold decorations, its soft electric lights, its velvet carpets and pretty frescoes. The royal box itself is a gem with pink *capetonnee* walls and the arms of Spain above the red and gold curtain. This is only the small royal box, as the Queen never uses the immense one that occupies the centre of the house except on very grand occasions. Behind the Queen's box is a pretty saloon, where she can retire to take refreshments between the acts. There is a telephone there, and it was through it that her Majesty received the news of Montpensier's death one night when the opera was going on.

In Madrid it is the custom for ladies to dress very much for the theatres or opera. They wear bonnets in the stalls, but nothing on their heads in the boxes. The greater part of the public keep chattering the whole time. It is difficult indeed for them to keep their attention fixed on the stage for any length of time, as they go so often to the theatre that they soon know the pieces by heart. However, at the Madrid opera there are a few who do go for the music. Such people always go to the *Paraiso*. Nothing can be

more select than this "paradise" where musicians, artists, and real lovers of the opera sit on hard benches, and endure the heat, so as to be able to hear the great singers at a reduced price. These *aficionados* or *connoisseurs* have their own way. They hiss the chattering aristocrats. They applaud every good note. They shout "*Fuera!*" when not pleased. It is to the Paraiso the artists sing, and for it they do their best. They tremble at the sight of some faces there high above in the clouds, as they know their real judges sit there.

These people hissed Gayarre when he began to sing, and only applauded him when his silvery voice became perfect. As for Patti she was once treated in a very slighting way by those who now throw flowers at her feet. The Madrileños have their favorites. They love the great orchestra director Manchinelli. They could not do without the comic singer Baldelli. They never tire of Stagno, but they are not over-enthusiastic with any lady singers of the day. When Nevada came to Madrid for the first time, she was loudly applauded. She returned once more, but a girl of seventeen called Pacini had learnt to imitate her so well that she even sang her favorite *Sonnambula* as well as the great American singer. When Nevada reappeared on the Madrid stage, she was so coldly welcomed that a sore throat was most timely invoked as a pretext for her giving up the rest of her engagement.

Nearly all the opera singers in Madrid live in the house of an Italian called Cataldi. It is a cozy old place, with large rooms looking out on the square before the Royal Palace. After the opera, the artists often have splendid suppers together. Many years ago the writer was present at one of those suppers. Tamberlich presided at the long table, and he sang also. His voice was so lovely then! It is a pity he did not retire before he grew old, and had to sing in provincial theatres for his living, because an unfortunate marriage helped to ruin him.

The *Teatro Español* is where all the great Spanish classical plays have always been produced. One must be a Spaniard or fully understand the language to be able to appreciate these grand old dramas of Cervantes, Calderon de la Barca, Duque de Rivas, etc. Even the *Juan Tenorio* of the still living aged poet Zarilla is so thoroughly Spanish that foreigners could hardly appreciate it. José Echegaray is the dramatic author of the day in Spain, and his plays are the most popular now in the *Teatro Español*. José Echegaray is a civil engineer by profession, but he loves to leave his more active profession to take his pen and in a few weeks can produce a splendid thrilling drama in verse which sends half Madrid wild. His personages are generally of the nineteenth century, and he depicts their vices, passions, and virtues to a degree that keeps you spellbound, as if in a hideous dream. He has one defect. He can only write good parts for men; his heroines are weak and not at all up to the standard of his heroes. Can it be that there are few women in Spain who could act as he would wish them to do? He has written dramas of such fame that even in America and in Germany his *Gran Galeote* was translated. José Echegaray is a rich man now. He is over fifty, with a fine intelligent forehead, keen eyes, and gray mustache. He is a favorite in most salons, but the ladies of Madrid cannot easily surpass in beauty his lovely wife. Looking even younger than her daughter, La Señora de Echegaray is still a splendid woman, with her graceful figure and jet black hair, a true Castilian type of sculptural beauty.

For years and years the *Teatro Espanol* had the same company. The clever energetic actor Vico, always takes the thrilling rôles of Eche-garray's old men. The more youthful rôles used to be assigned to Calvo, but, alas! he died when he was in the prime of life. Calvo was a splendid actor, and the Madrileños were terribly sad when they lost him, though his younger brother tries to replace him on the stage. Ricardo and Rafael Calvo were sons of a great actor; and above all things they prized a wreath of laurels thrown to their father years and years ago in the *Teatro Español*. The writer visited Calvo's home before his death. He was fond of showing visitors his children, of whom he was very proud. Twice a widower, he had five children. His eldest girl was only ten years old and was so clever that she received the same education as her brothers and has won her B. A. degree at the University. Calvo's sister and her husband, a clever Spanish writer, lived with him. Their home was a little detached house in the Castellana drive. The library and sitting-room were furnished and decorated with presents given to the great actor. He had so many gifts that they had even put them on shelves round the rooms. Statues, bronzes, pictures, books, arms, lined the walls and gave the apartment something of the aspect of an exhibition. Calvo was also very fond of birds, and he had a large cage full of rare species, and their singing could be heard from outside. Poor Rafael died in Andalucia of black smallpox, without any of his family near him.

The great actress of the *Teatro Espanol* has also disappeared, but not by death. Elisa Mendoza Tenorio was one of the youngest and best of Spanish actresses, and the Madrileños still hope she will some day appear once more on the stage of their classical theatre. She is not a beauty, but has large black eyes, a white skin, and possesses a splendid figure. She is a perfect lady, and comes of a good stock. She could easily assume the most difficult parts in all the great Spanish dramas, and could play equally well in the rôle of an *ingenue* or that of an old woman. Her one defect was her voice; that often became whining and monotonous. She often seemed to sing her parts instead of speaking them. However, Elisa was a favorite, and she deserved to be one. She was a loving daughter, and her greatest grief was when she lost her mother a year or two ago. Virtue has its reward, and a thriving young doctor loved, wooed, and won her, and now she is a happy wife and mother. Her friends beg Doctor Talosa Latour to allow his young wife to come even for once before the public, but he always refuses, and in their coquettish, bright little home the stage is never mentioned, and Elisa never goes to see a play all the year round.

The favorite Madrid theatre is called *La Comedia*. The owner of the house, Mario, is also the principal actor, and he spares no trouble and no expense in making his theatre attractive. He places on his stage good translations of French plays, or the very best of Spanish origin. He is wonderfully careful of details. He never allows the slightest mistake to be made on the stage, in the scenery, or in the makeup of the actors, etc. If his play is in Goya's time, for instance, the very pictures on the walls are of that epoch, the *cornucopias*, or rare looking-glasses; the quaint old oil lamps light up the scene. The actors warm themselves by the real *brasero* of those days; their dresses seem exact copies of Goya's pictures in the gallery, down to the tiny fans of the belles and the snuffboxes of the uglier sex. One seems to be looking at a lovely tapestry in the Escorial or

in the Pardo palace and it is difficult to believe one's self in a theatre. Mario is a perfect gentleman. He takes the most difficult rôles. His old men are splendid with cracked voice, hesitating gait, and trembling hands. He has always stuck to old friends and scarcely ever changes his company. His principal actor is Cepillo, a curious type, tall, ugly, but with a wonderfully fascinating way about him. I never saw a better *Maître de Forges* than Cepillo—so cold and severe, at the same time so loving and noble, the very type after the heart of the French novelist.

Sanchez de Leon is Mario's young man actor. He is a Catalan, and his harsh accent is against him, but he does well enough when he likes. His wife, the Guerrero, is a great favorite, an actress to the backbone, and she enjoys her rôles as much as the public who applaud her. She is very stout, but as active and free in her movements as a young girl. Her cross old women, ugly *duenas*, funny servants, naughty market women, are splendid, and she keeps the public laughing the whole time.

The young lady in Mario's company is the Señorita Martinez, a real beauty and the clubmen keep their glasses on her the whole time. She is a brunette with jet black locks, eyes of a true Spanish woman and a magnificent neck, as white as snow and beautifully shaped.

The last but not least of Mario's company is the comic actor Rossel. He is the funniest actor in the world; even his face makes one smile. He never learns his parts at all, he gets an idea of what he must be and he adds the words himself. He never does the same thing twice over and still he does not put the other actors out. When he and the Guerrero are acting together, they keep the house in a roar. He has so much natural wit and ingenuity that he is invaluable and of course a great favorite.

There are many other good theatres in Madrid such as the coquettish *Princesa*, which belongs to the Queen's late lady in waiting, the Duquesa de Medina de las Torres. The Duchess lets out her theatre, and thus every season the company changes. Another little theatre that the Madrileños love to frequent is *Lara*—such a funny little place, in the old part of the town. Here the real good Spanish *sainetes* or little comedies are played in one act and the public need only take seats for one *sainete* at a time or two. Four are played the same evening, and it is so curious to see a different public each time! It is a capital arrangement and often when a man about town finds it too early to go to his club he dashes off to *Lara* and for one hour enjoys a splendid little farce or play. The actors are always good and as for the pieces they are of the best repertoire. In *Lara* every year there is a new farce that only reproduces the events of the year. They are very well done and you see on the stage the last political crisis; the new government even appears and is splendidly taken off. The latest sensational murder, robbery, is mentioned. The newest inventions are turned into farces, and all this is accompanied with lovely quaint Spanish music written especially for the piece. These tunes are very pretty and soon become popular, and often go over Europe as real Spanish airs.

DULCINEA DEL TOBOSO.

BARGAINS IN PARLIAMENT.

It would be an easy matter to name off-hand half a dozen or more features about the House of Commons elected in 1892 which will make it